

ADDRESS

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DELIVERED BY

WILLIAM PITTMAN LETT

At the Grand Opera House, at the Annual Entertainment
of the St. Patrick's Literary Association, on the
18th March, 1878.

I was told on my way to this entertainment that I shall be out of place here to-night, but I don't believe it. I was told that, as a result of the little divisions amongst Irishmen in this city, this meeting had assumed a political complexion, but I don't believe it. If this is a political demonstration, this great audience is out of place, but I am not. I take my stand to-day upon the broad platform of Irish nationality; and without distinction of religious or political creed, I offer the right hand of fellowship to every man, woman and child, who by birth or descent, has the right to stand beside me. I will go further still. I feel that the arms of our friendliness of feelings, are long enough to encircle within the warm *cead mille a failltha* of their fraternal embrace, every Englishman, every Scotchman, and every Frenchman here, desirous of uniting with us to-night in the grand old Irish jig of our national festival.

I find that our worthy friend the President of the St. Patrick's Literary Association has put me down on the programme for an Irish Speech. This may occasion a little embarrassment, as some here may imagine that I am about to address you in the old Celtic tongue,—that epic poetry of all the languages—which our Scottish friends affirm most positively to have been the vernacular of Eden. I am not inclined to differ with them in this opinion, for song, tradition and story, agree in confirmation of the fact, that

"When Eve in all her pristine charms
Burst on fond Adam's view,
The first words that he said to her
Were *ciamar tha sibhn diugh!*"

The answer of the Mother of the human race has not been recorded, but I fancy

"That Eve replied with downcast eye,
And blush like rose in June,
I'll get your breakfast bye and bye
Ma bouchal bawn aroon."

I am acquainted with a few Celtic phrases. For instance, I know the meaning of *Faugh-a-Ballagh*, and so do the enemies of Britain know its meaning too, in every part of the world where the red hand of military fame has planted the laurels of victory along the path of heroic glory, cleared by the conquering bayonets of the Connaught Rangers. Were I not the President of a Temperance Society, at a convivial meeting, I could understand and perhaps appreciate the meaning of *Slauntha garth Mavourneen*. And were I young again, and sitting beside the girl of my heart, beneath the shade of the green willows on the bank of my own native Slaney, or under the shadow of a spreading maple on the banks of the noble Ottawa, she and I would soon comprehend the signification of

"*Granachree ma colleen oge,
My Molly ashore.*"

Not being sufficiently conversant with the dialect of Paradise, to address so large an audience as this, I shall have to trust

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once more to the nervous Anglo-Saxon that we all understand. But let me say here—and I say it in all sincerity—that it has been one of the greatest regrets of my life that I am unable to converse in the grand old Ossianic language, in which in their great campaigns against the Danes, Brian Boru and Malachi of the Golden Collar, marshalled their hosts of free-born men around them. And now, let me ask you all considerably to remember that this is the celebration of St. Patrick's Day, and that he who now stands before the critical intellectual battery of this audience, is an Irishman. I want you to keep these two points in view; in order that, should I inadvertently, in the enthusiasm of the moment, forget that Ireland does not actually constitute the whole world, and that the Irish Race does not stand a head and shoulders over all creation; you may be able, in the kindliness of your hearts, to pardon any seeming yet unintended exaggeration, on account of the warm home-loving patriotism of the feeling beneath it. I own, and I am not ashamed to acknowledge, that I am seriously affected by that hereditary, national epidemic which attacks every true-souled Irishman with aggravated virulence, once a year, in whatever part of the world, outside of his native land, his lot may be cast. It is a disease in the heart of the exile, for which there is no remedy but death. I know of nothing that can give you a more true and touching diagnosis of the nature and intensity of its symptoms, than a verse of an old Irish Song, which in my estimation is one of the sweetest, most pathetic and beautiful productions of the Irish Muse:

"I'm bidding you a long farewell,
My Mary kind and true,
But I'll not forget you darling
In the land I'm going to;
They say there's bread and work for all,
And the sun shines always there;
But I'll not forget Old Ireland
Were it fifty times as fair!"

Twelve months ago I had the honor of standing here to offer you my humble contribution to the interesting national festivities of that occasion. Festivities rendered doubly interesting by the attendance of the Vice-Regal Party from

Government House. A distinguished Irish party which would have been more pleasingly completed by the presence of His Excellency the Governor-General and the Countess of Dufferin, had it not been for the occurrence of an untoward accident which we all deeply deplored at the time. Now, having alluded to the Governor-General, do you think I can pass our illustrious countryman thus, by the mere mention of his name? For from it. This may be my last opportunity; and when you take into consideration that this is Ireland's Day, and that Lord Dufferin is an Irishman, I know you will pardon me if I take advantage of the situation. The people of Canada, and especially the Irishmen of Canada, have good reason to feel proud of their noble representative countryman, the Earl of Dufferin. He came to us a stranger. He soon found his way into our hearts as a friend; and when he leaves us he will leave many a vacant tenement behind him which cannot, and will not, easily again be filled. His administration of our national affairs, as Her Majesty's Representative, has been distinguished by the exercise of genius and ability of no ordinary stamp. It has been signalized by the display of wisdom, energy and experience, not less than by moderation and far-seeing sagacity. He is gifted with that rare and singularly happy combination of intellectual powers which has made him not less a statesman than an orator. He has steered fairly, boldly and brilliantly away out of the ordinary beaten track of stereotyped diplomacy, and left behind him a path of light which his successor can follow should its lustre not prove too dazzling. In all his public acts, as a Governor-General, he has been himself, original and alone. His replies to the addresses of the people have been perfect models of appropriateness and originalities; and in his public speeches in all parts of the Dominion, he has given to the world a series of genuine orations worthy of Ireland's brightest day, worthy of being transmitted to posterity as a voice from the present, proclaiming loudly and eloquently to the future that all that is great of Ireland is not in the tomb. Shortly after his advent amongst us, Lord Dufferin lighted the torch of his popularity at the kindly flame burning upon the

altar of a people's love. Throughout the five years of his official sojourn in Canada, it has burned on with steady and ever increasing radiance; and when the able hand that carries it so unfalteringly aloft shall be disappearing in the distance from our view, its last lingering rays will rest grandly and brightly upon the high places of the land, where he has written his name in enduring characters on our country's history. When, in the due course of events, that time shall arrive, Lord Dufferin may rest assured that he will bear away with him to his island home, the heartfelt regrets, as well as the most sincere and fervent wishes of the people of Canada, for the future welfare, happiness and prosperity of himself, the Countess of Dufferin and every other member of his family. If I have stepped aside from my starting point it was worth while to do so. I could not help it. The golden apples were too tempting to be resisted. And now I am here to-day as I was a year ago, to rejoice with you on the anniversary of the birthday of Ireland's Patron Saint, whose memory is revered, and most deservedly so, by Irishmen the wide world over. If we are to believe the records of history—and why should we not?—St. Patrick was essentially a great as well as a good man. His life was such a pre-eminently practical exemplification of the principles of Christianity, that Irishmen, Catholic and Protestant alike, are willing to claim him and anxious to own him. Consequently, this anniversary is always celebrated as a day of national rejoicing. Ask me not then, to-day, if I am a Protestant. Ask me not if I am a Catholic. Ask me not if I am a Tory. Ask me not if I am a Radical. I can have nothing to do, and I don't want to have anything to do, with questions involving so circumscribed and narrow a feeling. The dividing party lines on the purified tablets of each Irish heart, to-day, should be so indistinct as to be invisible. Ask me only to-day, if I am an Irishman. I desire specially, not to forget that I am one. I want to remember, now, the spot where I was born. And, although the crested billows of the blue Atlantic roll between that sacred spot and me, fancy can carry me, by the resistless power of fond affection, to the Shamrock-clad valleys of my native land; to revel in the

glowing grandeur of her past history, to dwell with patriotic devotion amid the scenes so dear to every Irish heart. I don't know how it is with others, but I do know, that as each vanishing year brings me nearer to the end, I feel love of country growing stronger and stronger in my heart. And when the end draws near,—when life's weary chariot wheels shall be slowly and more slowly turning, ere they stand still forever, with my latest breath let me exclaim:—

"Yet all those fond recollections suppressing,
One dying wish my lone bosom shall draw,
Erin, an exile bequeath's thee his blessing,
Land of my Forefathers—Erin go bragh!
Buried and cold when my heart stills its
motion,
Green be thy fields, sweetest Isle of the Ocean!
And thy harp-striking bards sing aloud with
emotion,
Erin Macourneen! Erin go bragh!"

I have said that fancy could carry me across the ocean. She has done so. I am there now. The fact is self-evident that the body is still here, but, like the rapid and flashing transit of the electric spark, the fetterless, unbound spirit is in its native land. And, as I look around me, every spot upon which my eye rests is classic ground, consecrated to genius and immortality by the footprints of statesmen, sages, warriors, philosophers, orators and poets. I knock at the door of the great temple of the nation's memory, and forthwith appears the illustrious shade of Henry John Grattan, marching in colossal dignity at the head of a long and brilliant procession of mighty spirits of the past; amongst whom I behold Burke, Sheridan, Shiel, O'Connell, Curran, Phillips, Barrington, Plunkett, Wolfe, Wellington and Flood! As that shadowy battalion of renown defiles in matchless majesty before me, who can blame me if I feel proud that I am a native born son of the same soil? I knock again, and, as at the touch of Aladdin's lamp, mighty and mysterious powers appeared, Ireland's ancient warrior kings, the imperishable monuments of her early greatness, her learning, her refinement and her civilization arise. And as I gaze upon the glorious vision, a voice within me whispers "these belong to you." I knock again, and as from the sepulchre of buried ages, come forth the bearded Bards and Harpers of

the land of song. The spectral phantoms of Turlough O'Carolan and Columbkille, the royal saintly Bard of Iona, glide side by side with the white-haired Minstrels of Tara. Now they are joined by Jonathan Swift, Oliver Goldsmith and Thomas Moore, and thrice welcome, aye, *cead mille a failltha*, to every Irish heart, Thomas Campbell, the pathetic author of the "Exile of Erin," with the Caledonian heather round his brow, by right, and the well-won and universally acknowledged freedom of the soil draws near and fraternizes those lustrous spirits of the Isle. They pass on and the undying music of their march sounds like a strain of glory from the past, travelling into the mists of coming years; as the rays of the dawning sunshine pierce with their penetrating splendour, the light riven shadows of the vanishing night. As I listen with rapture to the entrancing cadences of their National Anthem, with exultation I feel that they too—these fame—garlanded Apostles of Song! are mine. I knock again, and forth from their graves of glory in every land, country and clime throng the deathless Spirits of Ireland's warrior-dead. They who had fought, bled, conquered and died on every field where courage had found a hero, or honor had written an epitaph! The Genius of Fame is at their head, and, as with a voice that rings from pole to pole she sings the glories of their gallant deeds, I feel, after all, that it is something to be able to claim kindred with such heroic and immortal company! I knock, once more, and for the last time. It were better perhaps, had I not done so. But I have summoned the vision. I have raised the veil, and I must tell you what I see. The scene, alas! is changed. The prospect before me is appalling. I look upon a field of battle, yet I hear neither the tramp nor the trumpet blast of the invader. Dead men with Irish faces are lying on the ground. Living men with Irish faces and arms in their hands, are striding fiercely amid the slain. The conflict is bloody, but, at last the battle is over, and I am left almost alone with the dead. A stranger, at my side, from another land, while mournfully contemplating the dreadful scene, asks me "who hath done this? As he speaks, a combatant approaches. I know him not, but by his look I know he is a son of the Soil. With shame and

sorrow in my heart, in the presence of the stranger, I point to him, and in the language of the Prophet, I exclaim, "Thou art the man!" Fratricide! the red dishonor beneath thy feet is the blood of thy brother—the wasted life of thy own Mother's Son. Wipe the sanguinary stains from thy unholy brand of discord and let the soft and peaceful voice of patriotism plant the olive branch in thy heart. If I have, it may be, unwittingly stirred the buried embers of the past, I have done so with no evil intent. And now while I endeavor to cover them up again with the heart-wished for oblivion of a more generous impulse, let me, in one verse, interpret the meaning of the saddening vision in a manner that every Irishman, at least, will understand the illustration:—

"Then if while scenes so grand,
So beautiful shine before thee
Pride for thine own dear land
Should haply be stealing o'er thee;
O, let grief come first
O'er pride itself victorious,
To think how man hath cursed
What Heaven had made so glorious!"

Yes, Ireland came glorious from the hand of God. "Ireland had once a glorious history when she was the mart of learning and the resort of the Students of all nations. When Europe was a corpse beneath the hoof of the Vandal, then was Ireland famous,—then was she "the School of the West,"—the quiet habitation of science and literature. She had a glorious history before the crowning of Charlemagne,—before the Crescent waved over the fair fields of Andalusia. And when war raged like an angry demon in the heart of Europe, she held up the torch of knowledge as a beacon, and received with open arms, and the generous welcome of a courteous and refined civilization, all those who sought science or shelter within her peaceful bosom." However we may differ in some things—and is it not a pity that the inexorable despotism of an idea should divide us—on one point we can all agree. Dear old Ireland! Thy green fields, thy clear-flowing streams, thy wild mountains, thy beautiful lakes, thy emerald-robed valleys—even, thy very bogs, the tombs of thy ancient forests, are dear to our hearts. But while we honor our

native land, we are not insensible to the historic glories of our Sister Islands. We too, can glory in England's Shakspeare, her Milton, her Dryden, her Pope, her Byron, her Pitt, her Chatham, her Peel, her Russell, her Gladstone, and her Beaconsfield. We too, can glory in Scotland's Wallace, her Bruce, her Burns, her Scott, her Tanahill, her Ramsay, her Ferguson, and her Macaulay. Nor would he willingly forget what Liberty and Letters owe to France's André Chenier, her Rouget de Lisle, her Lamartine, her Guizot, her Thiers, and to that Moses of the modern gospel of Freedom, Humanity and Romance, Victor Hugo! I would not attempt to blight the bloom of England's Rose with the breath of envy. I would not pluck one thorn from the defiant emblem in Scotland's escutcheon, nor would I stand either silent or sullen, while our brother Islanders are singing the glories of their national renown. But while love of country remains one of the acknowledged cardinal virtues of the heart, I would not, if I could, be other than what I am, an Irishman. No, by every Shamrock in every Irish vale, never! No! though a sceptred hand should offer a King's ransom for what might be worthless to another, my birthright, which is everything to me. Let us, then, while we honor our native land—while we lovingly remember her here afar from her ocean-washed shore, try to feel that we are

brothers. Let us forget, but if we can't forget, let us suspend by the mesmeric influence of a common nationality, the bitterness and disunion of the past, and endeavor to realize the great fact that we belong to one soil and to one family; and that union and brotherly love are the only true elements of strength. Whatever we have done in the past. Whatever we shall do in the future, let us to-day, remember that we are children of the same dear old mother. We shall not make a bit worse Canadians because we honor our native land. A patriotic apostate is not to be trusted. The man who does not love the land of his birth, can have no affection for the land of his adoption. Our fellow-citizens of other nationalities—and we offer the right hand of fellowship to every one of them—will acknowledge the truth of this, when they discover that, in the grand and imposing struggle for national honor, Canadian development and progress, no stronger arm will be found than the arm of an Irishman. No more potent and sagacious guide in the majestic march of our Country's Liberty, Enlightenment and Civilization than the prophetic genius of the Irish mind. No more ennobling impulse will ever thrill in the great throbbing, expanding heart of this young and aspiring nation than that which gathers energy and inspiration from the enthusiastic spirit of the Irish Race!